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ORGANIZATION

CONVENTION CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF THE WORLD
CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE

WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE

Thirtieth session

Vilnius, Lithuania
8-16 July 2006

Item 18 of the Provisional Agenda: Other business

18B. Elements of reflection on the election of the members of the World Heritage Committee

SUMMARY

Following a Resolution adopted at the 14th session of the General Assembly of States Parties to the *World Heritage Convention* (UNESCO, 2003) on the election procedures (14 GA 4.2), the World Heritage Committee, at its 7th extraordinary session (UNESCO, 2004), adopted a new voting mechanism for the election of its members (Decision **7 EXT.COM 15**). This new mechanism was followed for the elections held during the 15th session of the General Assembly of States Parties to the *Convention* (UNESCO, 2005).

Although, this new voting mechanism was mostly appreciated by the States Parties, some reservations were expressed. Accordingly, the General Assembly requested the Secretariat to initiate a process to discuss possible alternatives to the present election system.

This document presents the advantages and disadvantages of the current voting mechanism. After reviewing the history of the debates on this issue in the past sessions of the General Assembly and the procedure used for the election of the UNESCO Executive Board members, this document provides some suggestions for a faster, simpler voting system, as well as ways towards an equitable regional and cultural representation in the Committee.

Draft Decision: 30 COM 18B; see Point VI.

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I. CONTEXT

1. Following a Resolution adopted at the 14th session of the General Assembly of States Parties to the *World Heritage Convention* (UNESCO, 2003) on the election procedures (14 GA 4.2), the World Heritage Committee, at its 7th extraordinary session (UNESCO, 2004), adopted a new voting mechanism for the election of its members (Decision **7 EXT.COM 15**), following a proposal made by the Delegation of New Zealand.
2. During the 15th session of the General Assembly of States Parties to the *World Heritage Convention* (UNESCO, 2005), 12 new Committee members were elected. Two ballots plus one vote by show-of-hands were necessary for the election of Mauritius on the reserved seat for a State Party with no property on the World Heritage List (as per Decision **29 COM 6**). Three rounds for the election of the 11 other new Committee members (Canada, Cuba, Israel, Kenya, Madagascar, Morocco, Peru, Republic of Korea, Spain, Tunisia and the United States of America).
3. Although, this new voting mechanism was mostly appreciated by the States Parties, some reservations were expressed, and the General Assembly requested the Secretariat to initiate a process to discuss possible alternatives to the present election system (see Annex V).

II. ADVANTAGES AND LIMITS OF THE VOTING MECHANISM FOLLOWED DURING THE 15TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY (UNESCO, 2005)

A. Advantages

4. Taking into account the new voting mechanism (Decision **7 EXT.COM 15**), the elections took place **in a separate room** from the Plenary. Accordingly, the **debates** which were taking place at the time of voting **were not disturbed**.
5. The polling station was **equipped with all voting facilities**. Due to an audio system, the Secretariat was able to follow the debates taking place in the Plenary and thus, update the list of candidates for the forthcoming election rounds without delay.
6. Four ballot boxes had been put into place, distributed in alphabetical order according to the States Parties' name. This allowed a **fast and smooth flow of the Delegates once they were in the room**.
7. A **pre-scheduled timetable** for the election rounds was adopted by the General Assembly. This allowed Delegates to know in advance the times they would be requested to vote and therefore to better manage their other commitments.

B. Disadvantages

8. At the announcement of the beginning of the ballot, most Delegates would leave the Plenary to cast their vote, resulting in a **queue outside the polling station**. This increased the time they would spend out of the Plenary.

9. Some Delegations expressed concern over the **low participation rate in some of the election rounds**. However, exactly how much the problem of low participation rate can be attributed to the new voting system is a matter of debate; there are two considerations in this context. First, the publication of the election timetable in the various editions of the General Conference Mini-Journal (paper and online versions) and its announcement through the intercom and by the Chairpersons of the various General Conference Commissions however ensured that all Delegates were aware of the elections at all time. Audio announcements were also made outside the meeting rooms five minutes prior to the closure of the polling station to remind Delegates who had not cast their votes yet to do so.
10. Second, even though suggested by one of the Delegations, it seems difficult to operate on a “roll-call” basis to ensure a higher participation rate, as the voting process is on a “secret ballot” basis. Furthermore, some States Parties may not be able to cast their vote at some point of the election process. In this regard, a proxy-voting system could be suggested.
11. Many Delegations considered the voting mechanism too much complex, time-consuming and disruptive in comparison with the other items of the Agenda of the General Assembly.

III. THE EXAMPLE OF THE ELECTION OF THE UNESCO EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBERS

12. As the election procedures of the Executive Board of UNESCO, especially its electoral groups system, were given as an example by several Delegations in the past sessions of the General Assembly of States Parties to the *World Heritage Convention*, it is interesting to look at how this body conducts the election of its members.
13. In order to ensure a balanced geographical representation, the election of the 58 members of the Executive Board of UNESCO takes place according to electoral Groups (geographical groups), each Group having a pre-defined number of seats reserved.
14. Every second year, part of the Executive Board has to be replaced. Each electoral Group knows exactly the number of seats it is renewing. Through a negotiation process within each electoral Group, and prior to the election, it is possible to have a situation whereby each Group presents a number of candidates equal to the number of seats to be filled (“clean slate”).

IV. TOWARDS A BALANCED GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL REPRESENTATION IN THE COMMITTEE

A. Debates on the “balanced geographical and cultural representation” in the past sessions of the General Assembly of States Parties to the World Heritage Convention

15. According to Article 8.2 of the *Convention*, the States Parties are obliged, with regard to election of members to the World Heritage Committee, *to ensure an equitable representation of the different regions and cultures of the world*.
16. As requested by several Delegations during the 15th session of the General Assembly (UNESCO, 2005), the history of the debates / discussion during the past General Assembly sessions on the balanced geographical and cultural representation in the Committee has been investigated and is presented in Annex I.
17. Three Resolutions were adopted by the General Assembly at its 7th, 12th and 13th sessions, with the view of improving the balanced geographical and cultural representation of the regions and cultures of the world in the Committee, as recommended in Article 8.2 of the *Convention* through:
 - a) Inviting States Parties candidates to the election to voluntarily reduce their term of office from 6 to 4 years if elected,
 - b) Reserving a certain number of seats for a States Parties with no property on the List,
 - c) Discouraging out-going Committee members to seek consecutive terms of office

B. Proposals for a balanced geographical and cultural representation in the World Heritage Committee

18. It has been suggested in the past, and as early as the 1st General Assembly in 1976 (see Annex I), that the allotment of seats in the World Heritage Committee should follow a geographical distribution which allows to correct the current imbalances.
19. Elections of Committee Members could be organized by **electoral groups with pre-defined number of seats**, according to the World Heritage geographical distribution. **Four seats could be distributed to each electoral Group** (Africa, Arab States, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and North America, and Latin America and the Caribbean), the last seat being normally reserved to a State Party having no property on the World Heritage List (“Reserved seat”).

V. TOWARDS A FASTER AND MORE SIMPLE ELECTION MECHANISM

20. The elections should still take place **in a separate room** from the Plenary and the polling station should be **equipped with all voting facilities**.
21. The election should consist in **only one round**.

22. As for the Executive Board (Rule 95 of the Rules of Procedures of the UNESCO General Conference), the Chairperson of the General Assembly would declare elected to the World Heritage Committee those candidates who obtain the greatest number of votes up to the number of seats to be filled.
23. If two or more candidates obtain the same number of votes, and as a result, there are still more candidates than seats to be filled, there shall be a second ballot restricted to those candidates. If in this second ballot, two or more candidates obtain the same number of votes, the Chairperson of the General Assembly shall decide the candidate to be considered elected by drawing lots.
24. Ballot papers would be distributed to States Parties according to the **electoral Groups** (one colour per Group) **the morning of the first day, prior to the election.**
25. The election process **would take place during the afternoon of the first day.**
26. This way, the election of the World Heritage Committee members would be an extremely fast procedure, all negotiations having been done prior to the session. Furthermore, an electronic ballot system could be envisaged.
27. It should be recalled that the introduction of electoral groups and the changes of the methods of obtaining the results of the voting would necessitate an amendment of Rule 14 of the Rules of Procedures of the General Assembly of States Parties to the *World Heritage Convention*.

VI. DRAFT DECISION

Draft Decision: 30 COM 18B

1. *Having examined Document WHC-06/30.COM/18B,*
2. *Recalling the Resolution adopted at the 15th session of the General Assembly of States Parties to the World Heritage Convention (UNESCO, 2005),*
3. *Invites States Parties to submit their comments on the above-mentioned Document to the World Heritage Centre by 1 February 2007;*
4. *Requests the Director of the World Heritage Centre to prepare a working document taking into account the comments received for examination by the Committee at its 31st session in 2007.*

History of the debates on the issue of a balanced geographical and cultural representation in the World Heritage Committee since the 1st General Assembly of States Parties to the *World Heritage Convention*

Session of the General Assembly	Year	Summary of the debates on the election of Committee members
1st	1976 26 SP	<p>Following a proposal by the Delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic to assign the 15 seats according to electoral groups, as done for the various bodies of UNESCO, there was a wide exchange of views on the principles to be applied in distributing the seats.</p> <p>An agreement on such arrangement could not be reached, advocating Article 8, paragraph 2 of the <i>World Heritage Convention</i> by which, <i>Election of members of the Committee shall ensure an equitable representation of the different regions and cultures of the world.</i></p>
2nd	1978 40 SP	<p>The number of seats was increased from 15 to 21 due to the high rate of ratification of the <i>Convention</i>, as foreseen in Article 8.1.</p> <p>A Delegation proposed to set up electoral groups with pre-defined number of seats. Other Delegates objected that a body with only 40 States Parties could not be subject to the same procedures than a body with 145 Member States, and that the Committee should retain some flexibility.</p> <p>The Chairperson invited the Delegates <i>to bear in mind the moral obligation to achieve an equitable distribution.</i></p>
6th	1987 96 SP	<p>Before the election, several Delegates, referring the Article 8.2 of the <i>Convention</i>, drew the attention of the General Assembly on the under-representation of Latin America, Africa and the Arab States within the Committee.</p> <p>After the election, several Delegations remarked a <i>lack of balance in the distribution of the seats to the geographical groups.</i></p> <p>The Chairperson was then requested <i>to review the procedures of election in order to ensure the universal and cultural representation within the Committee foreseen by the Convention.</i></p> <p>The ADG for Culture and Communication said this matter would be brought to the attention of the World Heritage Committee.</p>
7th	1989 111 SP	<p>An Agenda item (item 7) was dedicated to the <i>Examination of the means to ensure an equitable distribution of the different regions and cultures of the world.</i></p> <p>The proposal to increase the number of Committee members to 36 was not sustained.</p> <p>The General Assembly adopted a Resolution on this matter (see Annex II) and requested the World Heritage Committee to reflect on this issue at its next session.</p>
8th	1991 117 SP	<p>An Agenda item (item 7) was dedicated to the <i>Examination of the means to ensure an equitable distribution of the different regions and cultures of the world.</i></p> <p>A Delegation requested the Secretariat to present charts and tables on the composition of the Committee.</p> <p>The General Assembly expressed its wish that this matter be further considered by the World Heritage Committee at its next session.</p>

10th	1995 143 SP	<p>Some changes to the procedures of election of the World Heritage Committee members were adopted in order to simplify the voting system and to avoid excessive number of ballots (Rules 13.4, 13.8, 13.9 and 13.10 of the Rules of procedures of the General Assembly).</p> <p>The proposal to forbid an out-going Committee member to present its candidature for immediate re-election (advocated earlier on to promote the rotation principle) was rejected.</p>
11th	1997 148 SP	<p>No discussion on geographical representation.</p> <p>Just before the election of the new Committee members, the Director of the World Heritage Centre however recalled that Article 8.2 of the <i>Convention</i> provides that <i>election of members of the Committee shall ensure an equitable representation of the different regions of the world</i>. He noted that Group II was not represented.</p>
12th	1999 157 SP	<p>Stressing the discrepancy between the number of States Parties and the number of Committee members and referring to Article 8.2 of the <i>Convention</i>, some speakers requested an equitable representation within the Committee. Certain speakers evoked a possible reduction of the length of the mandate of Committee members.</p> <p>The Legal Advisor was consulted on the implications of a change of the number of seats in the Committee.</p> <p>The General Assembly adopted by consensus a Resolution on the Equitable Representation in the World Heritage Committee (see Annex III), requesting the Committee to set up a working group on this issue and the inscription of an item on the Agenda of the 31st General Conference in 2001 on this issue.</p>
13th	2001 167 SP	<p>The equitable representation in the World Heritage Committee was one of the Agenda items of the 13th General Assembly (Item 9), as a follow-up to the Resolution adopted by the 12th General Assembly (see Annex III) and the proposals of the Working group established by the Committee at its 24th session (Cairns, 2000).</p> <p>Following wide discussion on several proposals (voluntary/obligatory reduction of term of office from 6 to 4 years, increase of the number of seats in the Committee to 28, seats reserved to States Parties with no site on the World Heritage List) and their implications on the <i>Convention</i> itself, the General Assembly adopted a Resolution (see Annex IV), <i>inviting States Parties to voluntarily reduce their term of office from 6 to 4 years</i>, as well as <i>discouraging States Parties from seeking consecutive terms of office</i>. It also confirms that a certain number of seats be reserved to States Parties with no site on the World Heritage List.</p>
14th	2003 178 SP	<p>Previous General Assembly Resolutions were recalled before the election process.</p> <p>Some controversial discussion took place about the fact that some candidates were announcing their intention to reduce their term of office to 4 years, and the influence it could have on the outcome of the election. It was suggested that such announcement be made after the election, not prior.</p> <p>The election procedure was suspended to allow consultation among electoral groups.</p>

15th	2005 180 SP	<p>Aware that the geographical representation might not be attained, the Chairperson suspended the session to allow Delegations to further consult on this matter.</p> <p>A proposal was brought forward by the Delegation of Norway, which was adopted by the General Assembly, to review the voting mechanism to <i>ensure balanced geographical representation in the Committee as well as faster and less complicated voting system</i> (see Annex V).</p> <p>It should be noted that all States Parties elected to the Committee had reduced their term of office from 6 to 4 years.</p>
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Resolution on the Equitable Representation in the World Heritage Committee
adopted by the 7th General Assembly
of States Parties to the *World Heritage Convention*

UNESCO
9 and 13 November 1989

"The General Assembly of States Parties to the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage,

Recalling Article 8, paragraph 2, of the Convention which stipulates that 'Election of members of the Committee shall ensure an equitable representation of the different regions and cultures of the world';

Considering that for this purpose it is important to observe the practice of rotation in the representation of States Parties on the Committee;

Invites the States Parties to the World Heritage Convention, whose mandates on the Committee expire, to consider not to stand for re-election during an appropriate period;

Requests the Chairman, at each election, to invite States Parties to take account of this Resolution;

Invites the President of the World Heritage Committee to do everything in his power to encourage the States Parties, whose mandates on the Committee have just expired, to remain closely associated with its work for a period of four years, in conformity with Article 8.1 of the Committee's Rules of Procedure;

Invites the World Heritage Committee to give further consideration at its meetings in the next two years to additional procedures, such as regional quotas, to ensure an equitable representation of the different regions and cultures of the world, as required by Article 8, paragraph 2, of the Convention;

Invites furthermore the World Heritage Committee to formulate proposals in view of financing, in whole or in part, travel and sojourn expenses for the members of the Committee representing the least developed countries."

**Resolution on the Equitable Representation in the World Heritage Committee
adopted by the 12th General Assembly
of States Parties to the *World Heritage Convention***

**UNESCO
28 - 29 October 1999**

The General Assembly of States Parties:

Underlining the importance of an equitable representation of the World Heritage Committee and the need to increase the number of its members,

Taking into consideration the intervention of the Chairperson of the World Heritage Committee on this subject,

Requests the World Heritage Committee:

- a) to set up a working group to study this question and to submit proposals to the thirteenth General Assembly of States Parties,
- b) to request the inscription of an item on the agenda of the thirty-first General Conference concerning this issue.

**Resolution on the Equitable Representation in the World Heritage Committee
adopted by the 13th General Assembly
of States Parties to the *World Heritage Convention***

**UNESCO
30-31 October 2001**

The General Assembly,

Recalling Article 8, paragraph 2, of the Convention which stipulates that “Election of members of the Committee shall ensure an equitable representation of the different regions and cultures of the world”;

Recalling Article 9 of the Convention which stipulates that “The term of office of States members of the World Heritage Committee shall extend from the end of the ordinary session of the General Conference during which they are elected until the end of its third subsequent ordinary session”;

Recalling the Resolution of the 7th General Assembly of States Parties (1989);

Considering the representivity of the World Heritage List could be enhanced through the increased participation in the work of the Committee of States Parties whose heritage is currently unrepresented in the List;

Considering that the strong interest of States Parties in participating in the work of the World Heritage Committee could be addressed by a more frequent rotation of Committee members;

Invites the States Parties to the World Heritage Convention, to voluntarily reduce their term of office from six to four years;

Encourages States Parties that are not members of the Committee to make use of their right to participate in meetings of the World Heritage Committee as observers;

Discourages States Parties from seeking consecutive terms of office in the World Heritage Committee;

Decides that before each election of Committee members, the President of the General Assembly of States Parties will inform States Parties of the situation of the representation of regions and cultures in the World Heritage Committee and World Heritage List;

Decides to amend its Rules of Procedure as follows:

New Rule to be inserted after Rule 13.1

A certain number of seats may be reserved for States Parties who do not have sites on the World Heritage List, upon decision of the World Heritage Committee at the session that precedes the General Assembly. Such a ballot for reserved seats would precede the open ballot for the remaining seats to be filled. Unsuccessful candidates in the reserved ballot would be eligible to stand in the open ballot.

Amendment to existing Rule 13.8 (new text in bold)

13.8 Those States obtaining in the first ballot the required majority shall be elected, unless the number of States obtaining that majority is greater than the number of seats to be filled. In that case, the States obtaining the greatest number of votes, up to the number of seats to be filled, shall be declared elected. ~~If the number of States obtaining the majority required is less than the number of seats to be filled, there shall be a second ballot, followed by a third and, if necessary a fourth, to fill the remaining seats.~~ **If the number of States obtaining the majority required is less than the number of seats to be filled, there shall be a second ballot. If the number of States obtaining the majority required is still less than the number of seats to be filled there shall be a third and, if necessary a fourth ballot, to fill the remaining seats. For the third and fourth ballots,** the voting shall be restricted to the States obtaining the greatest number of votes in the previous ballot, up to a number twice that of the seats remaining to be filled.

Decides that this resolution should be implemented immediately.

**Resolution on the voting mechanism
for the election of World Heritage Committee members
adopted by the 15th General Assembly
of States Parties to the *World Heritage Convention***

**UNESCO
10-11 October 2005**

The General Assembly of States Parties to the *World Heritage Convention* asks the Secretariat, in cooperation with the President of the World Heritage Committee, to initiate a process until the General Assembly in 2007, to discuss possible alternatives to the present election system to the World Heritage Committee.

The alternative(s) presented to the General Assembly in 2007 should ensure balanced geographical and cultural representation in the Committee, a less time-consuming and less complicated voting system, and better focus on important issues in the proceedings of the General Assembly.